

Hurricane damage

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Andrew, Hugo, Camille, Opal, Floyd, and now Isabel ...

ordinary names for extraordinary weather. These are only a few of the better known, most costly, and most deadly hurricanes recorded. Starting on September 17th this year, Hurricane Isabel moved its way across the North Carolina Outer Bank Islands, Virginia, and Maryland. It left behind a wake of destruction, including putting

Langley AFB underwater and knocking out power to over 1.8 million customers in Virginia alone. That was 82 percent of the population, and a week later there were still 25 percent without lights. So with this being November why talk about hurricanes now, the season is almost over? There are several reasons. One

is there are 11 ACC bases in hurricane prone areas. But, the most important is a lack of hurricane awareness and preparation are common threads among all major hurricane disasters. By knowing your vulnerability and what actions you should take, you can reduce the effects of a hurricane disaster. This means

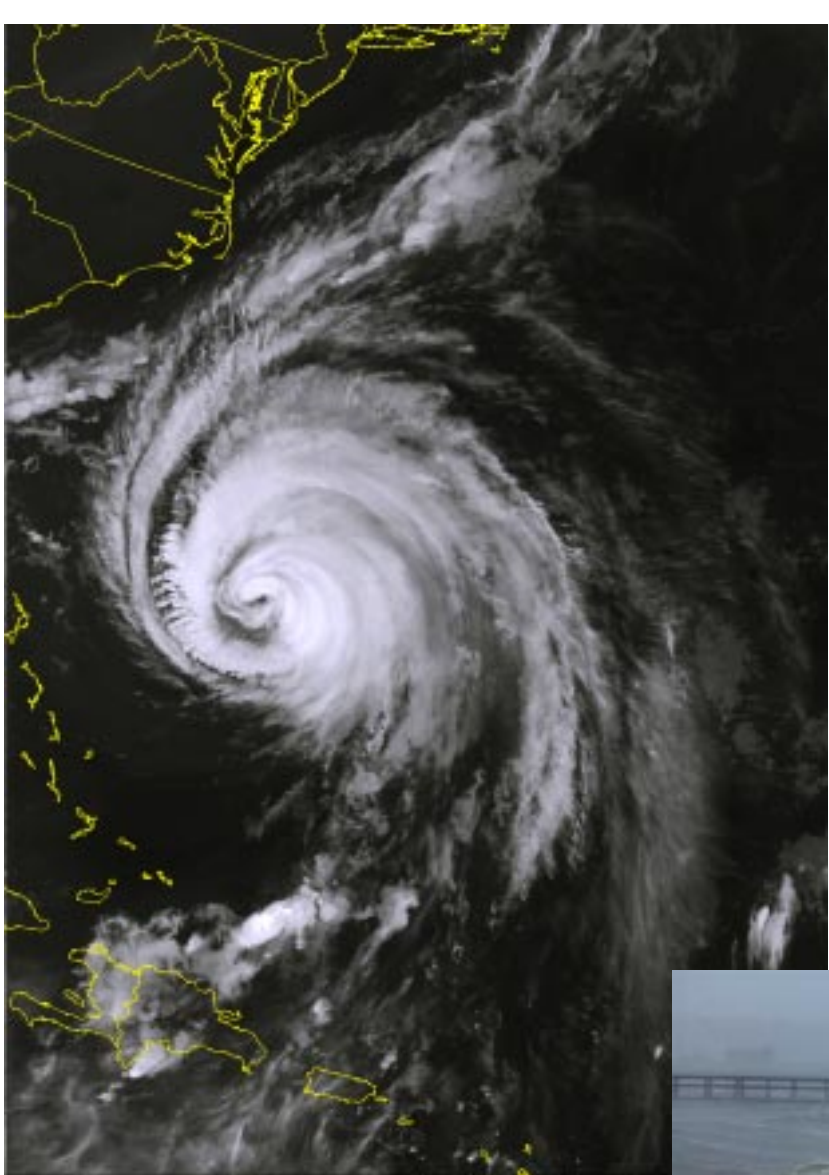
it is important for your family to have a plan that includes all of the safety actions associated with each type of hurricane hazard and prepare your family disaster plan accordingly. Taking care of some of these items as well as deciding what you will do in critical situations before the storm season arrives will help

prevent you from last minute rushing which often leads to poor decision making or getting yourself into a dangerous situation.

Hurricane Awareness

It seems odd that a lack of awareness would be a common thread in a major hurricane di-

saster since we now have such accurate storm tracking. Besides that it takes days for a tropical storm to build to a hurricane and slowly make its way to land. It appears you have endless time to prepare. In addition, statistics show us it's unlikely you will be in a hurricane's path even if you live in a hurricane prone region.



Above Photo: Satellite image of Hurricane Isabel off the east coast on September 17, 2003. **Right Photo:** Storm surge waves off Langley AFB on September 18th, 2003. **Opposite Page:** Recovery efforts on Langley AFB after the storm.

A typical season brings 10 tropical cyclones, with six becoming categorized hurricanes and one hitting the U.S. coast.

However, this constant monitoring and apparent predictability leads to complacency and an attitude of "it's unlikely to hit here." The reality is hurricanes remain unpredictable. For example, rarely can a storm's landfall be predicted within a 300 mile radius earlier than 72 hours out. This means large areas of the coast are on alert for several days waiting to see if the storm will make last minute changes and come their way. In addition to their unpredictable landfall, we don't know exactly how high the storm surge will be, how much rain the storm will dump, how many tornadoes it will spawn, or how high the winds will be. A storm can sit and build in intensity, or like Isabel, die down from a Category 5 to a Category 2 just a

couple days before making landfall. The drop in wind speed encouraged many to stay thinking the worst hazard of the hurricane is the wind, but in Isabel's case and many others, flooding and storm surge are more deadly and destructive. In fact, Isabel may have brought the worst flooding the region has seen in 70 years and is preliminarily in the top five most costly storms according to the National Hurricane Center.

Along with Isabel, ACC has experienced the dev-

storm season starts to keep you from getting hurt or possibly becoming a fatality. For example, what criteria are you going to use to decide whether you stay or go inland? Should you board up your home? What do you do if you lose power or water? How many days should you expect to be without utilities? How will you get news on recovery efforts? Who do you call if you need assistance? What type of insurance coverage do you need? Does your coverage include all the hazards associated with hurricanes or do you need additional insurance? (Many companies won't insure once a storm is predicted to hit an area.) There's water to store; emergency equipment like batteries, non-perishable food, candles, propane, and charcoal to stock; and first aid kits to build. These are some of the obvious items, but some other things like servicing your chain saw, trimming trees away from your home, purchasing a generator, having extra fuel on hand, or replacing batteries in your carbon monoxide/smoke detectors are less obvious, and can keep you off the roads in those final hours before a hurricane strikes.

Some other items you can't accomplish until the hurricane is

imminent, but they are no less important. Simple things like storing all loose items from your yard and taping windows help minimize wind and rising water damage. Once you make a decision to stay or go, stick with it. When the water starts rising or winds go above 55 mph, being in an automobile is much less safe than your home. It may be uncomfortable, but stay put until the waters recede and the winds die down. Finally, stock up on ice or freeze your own blocks and have your cooler ready, in case you need to transfer items if the power remains out for more than a day, and fill your car with gas.



September 18th, 2003

astating effects of hurricanes two other times this past 15 years. Many still remember how Hurricane Andrew wiped out Homestead AFB, Fla., in 1992 and how Hurricane Hugo pummeled Shaw AFB and Myrtle Beach AFB, S.C., in 1989. In all cases, we knew the storms were coming well in advance, but where they would make landfall and how powerful they would be remained a question until they struck the coast.

Don't Be a Fatality

There are many decisions you can and should make before the

Aftermath

One of the greatest safety hazards of a storm's aftermath is traffic accidents. The first couple of days after the storm are dangerous, stressful, and the worst time to be out shopping or on the road. How important is it really to get ice for your perishable refrigerator items? The day after a hurricane is usually sunny and beautiful and everyone ventures out to see the damage. If you planned ahead and stocked up on non-perishables or even thought to buy ice and store it in your freezer, you can stay safe at home and out of the crazy traffic snarls not to mention the contentious lines of other people who were unprepared. Driving around town where all the traffic lights are out, trees and power lines are down, and debris is everywhere is not smart. Within 1 week after Isabel hit, 27 of the 29 deaths were attributed to traffic accidents.

Finally use common sense. It seems there are always house fires after storms, and although some are caused by electrical problems, most are caused by people not using common sense and doing things like using propane and charcoal grills in the house. Other people are hospitalized or even die from carbon monoxide poisoning from using grills or even propane lanterns indoors. Those hazards are obvious, but another not so obvious safety hazard is running a generator in the basement or garage. Since it is a combustion engine, it also can cause carbon monoxide poisoning. A final thought, operating a chain saw above your head or while perched precariously on your roof is also not smart. Some tree removal is best left to the experts.

Every June residents on the Pacific, Atlantic, and Gulf Coasts brace for the statistical one hurricane which will hit the U.S., hoping this year won't bring another record storm to their area. Chances are it won't, but with a little common sense and early preparation you will be ready if it does. ►

Editor's note: For more information visit The National Hurricane Center's website at www.nhc.noaa.gov.

✓ Checklist for Hurricane Preparedness

- ✓ Discuss the type of hazards that could affect your family.
- ✓ Know your home's vulnerability to flooding and wind.
- ✓ Locate a safe room in your home for each hurricane hazard.
- ✓ Know the safest areas within your community.
- ✓ Determine escape routes from your home and places to meet.
- ✓ Have an out-of-state point of contact, so that your family members will know how to reach you.
- ✓ Make a plan now for your pets if you need to evacuate.
- ✓ Post emergency telephone numbers by your phones.
- ✓ Stock non-perishable emergency supplies.
- ✓ Have a NOAA weather radio, and remember to replace its battery every 6 months.
- ✓ Take first aid, CPR and disaster preparedness classes.
- ✓ Plan for the possibility of a long period of recovery and operating without electricity and water.
- ✓ Check your insurance coverage — flood damage is not usually covered by homeowner's insurance.

